

Mr. Ford's Page

ONE of the American poets has a line which runs somewhat like this—"All of good the past hath had, remains to make our own time glad." He probably had his own special thought about that fact when he wrote the words, and being a poet it is quite likely that some aspects of the truth, or illustrations of it, did not occur to him. But the heart of any great utterance, the quality that makes it live, is its element of truth. And many a truth is uttered, the full meaning of which is not comprehended by him to whom it is given to utter it. There is a prophetic element in truth—the future keeps fulfilling it.

If you begin even at so common a point as house furnishing, the poet's line still holds good. There was something about the old-fashioned furniture that not only satisfied the demand of utility but also satisfied the eye. The old chairs were not only strong and comfortable, but because they were that they were graceful also. They were pleasant to look upon as well as rest upon. They became "old-fashioned" in the eyes of a succeeding generation, and were displaced by strange designs which were often neither useful nor ornamental. But now, do you notice, they are coming back, the old-fashioned rocking chairs, the old-fashioned straight chairs, the old-fashioned sofas and the old-fashioned tables. And for no other reason than that they satisfy better than the new-fashioned ones.

This is perhaps more generally noticeable in the return of fireplaces. It was once the fashion to board up the fireplaces in old-fashioned homes and "paper" over the space. Stoves were all the style. Stoves, of course, are useful, but people like to see the fire. Children love to see the "eyes of fire" shining through the sliding front doors of the kitchen cook-stove. Adults like the sight of fire in the old-fashioned "self-feeder," now re-christened the "base-burner."

But none of these satisfy like the free leaping flames of the fireplace, and it is becoming quite the custom in many parts to build even the smaller homes with fireplaces. Our contact with fire is about the only natural contact we can keep in our city life. Fire is elemental. Fire is common to the earth beneath and the stars and suns above. We feel united again to the natural order in the presence of domestic fire. Simply to look at it—how it draws our gaze, how it fascinates us into dreams and visions!

There is a passage in the Bible which says all this in a few words: "I am warm; I have seen the fire." The very sight of fire, domestic fire, is comfortable both to the spirit and the body. The fireplace is coming back because it is one of the good things of the past which the present is not willing to let disappear.

It is so with wheels. In the earlier days everyone, or nearly every family, had its own conveyance. It was so much a necessity, a family necessity, that no one thought of it as a luxury. Animals were cheap, conveyances were easily constructed.

Then with the invention of steam transportation and the growth of cities, individual conveyances began to decrease in number, so much so that in England the term "gigman," or a man who owned a gig, was descriptive of aristocracy. Until a few years ago everyone, except a comparative few in the whole population, traveled by train or street car. And although the railway did a great deal toward diminishing the greater distances, it tended to increase the lesser distances. The intercommunication of the community was decreased. People could not so easily get about their immediate environment. It became difficult even to cross the space of a city. Wheels for local conveyance became fewer and fewer.

But once more the world is on wheels, and it will never get off them again. Individual and family transportation is not only a nation-wide but a world-wide fact. Instead of there being less wheels under personal direction in the future, there will be more

and better ones. What the past found good and necessary, the present is finding good and necessary, and it will be the same in the future.

So, you could go through the whole round of daily living and find the old things coming back. We are even going back to the use of water power to a greater extent than ever our forbears did. It may be that we shall sometime find many of the old-time domestic arts return to the household. What an influence for good it would have on trade at large if the households of the land learned again what constitutes good quality in clothing and food. We are being clothed with shoddy because we do not know how to identify good quality in the goods we buy. Our mothers could run their fingers over a piece of cloth and tell to the thread what constituted it. They were good buyers because they knew material qualities. But since the household arts have disappeared, we are at the mercy of the adulterator in foods and fabrics and other manufactured

materials. Who knows but that the spinning wheel may yet return alongside the fireplace, the old settle, and the family conveyance? Who knows but that the family bake oven will return also? One thing is quite clear, if there were more of the art of baking bread in the land, the price of bread would more nearly conform to the price of wheat than it does now. But this phase of return to the old ways awaits a period of invention which will put at the disposal of the housewife the same improvements which have come to pass in other fields. We may yet see contrivances appear which will make the household more a self-sustaining community than it now is. Contrivances that shall separate the work from the drudgery will revolutionize the work of housekeeping, as they have done in other fields.

One former practice ought to come back at once, and that is the good old-fashioned habit of providing for the winter. All-the-year-round industrialism has had a tendency to make us an improvident folk in this regard. The fervor of the old-time Thanksgiving arose from the fact that men could see their winter provisions ahead of them. They had a feeling of snugness and security. The wood-piles were ample, the cellar was stored with the substantial necessities of life. There was no dread of the ordinary preventable lacks of supply.

It would seem that this practice is well worth restoring and preserving. It is an undeniable fact that although we live in cities, although we have largely

left the agricultural field, we are still affected by the seasons, just as it is true that although we have practically abolished night from our cities, we are still affected by the night. Civilization has not abolished winter in the least, only a few of its physical discomforts.

We should be approaching the winter in a better frame of mind if we could think of all the families of the country as well provided against their winter needs. If we could feel today, in looking abroad on our country and the world, that like the bees and the squirrels, the families of the earth had kept winter in mind all through the allurements to summer extravagance, and had fortified themselves against the slackness and needs of winter, it would generate a spirit of thankfulness which would be entirely purged of selfishness and would itself constitute a hymn of happiness.

The old ways were not so foolish after all. They met the old necessities, and the old necessities are with us yet. Life is a business to be managed; and a great many people are "poor managers." This is not because they cannot be anything else, but simply because they have not grasped the idea that life is to be managed. The home is a little corporation in itself and needs something of the wise foresight, the wise repression of unprofitable impulses which keep other institutions solvent and afloat.

The old industry, the old thrift, the old preference of the necessary rather than the unnecessary, will help bring back something of the old material security.

IF A thing is old, it is a sign that it was fit to live. Old families, old customs, old styles survive because they are fit to survive. We notice it now in the return of the old styles in furniture: utility and beauty were more perfectly blended in the furniture of our fathers than in the gingerbread fashions which succeeded them. The old-fashioned fireplace is returning also. The closed fire is a good thing and will survive; but the open fire is good too, and is coming back by tens of thousands every building season. Old-fashioned hospitality ought to come back, and old-fashioned politeness and honor. And the very wise habit of imitating the squirrels, and laying by in store for the winter. It would be a much happier Thanksgiving if we could know that everyone was stocked up against the needs of winter.